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Translation and Its Consequences in Qualitative Social Research: On Distinguishing "the Social" from "the Societal"

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Key words: social;
society; societal;
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ideal, universal;
particular;
translation;
interpretation

Abstract: The translation of research texts between different languages is a possible impossible (ROTH, 2013). With translation come serious dangers for theorizing when words are translated into terms that do not cover the same conceptual field. This study investigates one such instance, which pertains to the difference between the social and the societal, and which possibly has devastating effects on many theories in the sociocultural, cultural-historical, and societal historical tradition. In the German and Russian versions of his works, Karl MARX used apparently quite distinctly the equivalents of the English adjectives "social [*sozial, social'nyj*]" and "societal [*gesellschaftlich, obščestvennyj*]." Many scholars do not distinguish the two notions, and in English, both are translated into "the social." This article exhibits the conceptual distinction MARX makes by explicitly tying the emergence of the universal to society (exemplified in *value*) rather than to any smaller social group. In this vein, some phenomena, such as consciousness or the psyche are virtually always *societal* [*gesellschaftlich, obščestvennyj*]. Implications are sketched for the possibility of quite differently reading philosophical and psychological works in the MARXIAN tradition when the distinction is made.

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1. Introduction

In an increasingly globalized world that also maintains an emphasis on the cultural and linguistic identities of specific groups, translation is a *sine qua non*. It has been suggested that the translation itself constitutes a form of doing (qualitative social) research, especially if social structures are concerned (TAROZZI, 2013). An earlier contribution to the FQS debate on the quality of qualitative research suggests that the translation between two (or more) languages is both possible and impossible at the same time (ROTH, 2013). There are dangers when authors translate from their native languages into English, which has become the *lingua franca* of the scholarly world. Moreover, many important theorists have written (thought) in a language other than English; the translations of these works into the *lingua franca* come with the devastating danger that the original theory is not only misrepresented but also completely distorted. This issue is particularly important in research drawing on qualitative methods, which, more so than its counterpart drawing on quantitative methods, is concerned with the sense and signification ("meaning") of words and situations in the lives of real people. [1]

In this article, rather than focusing on the translations of research data, I exemplify the translation problems with a case from the theoretical literature. I show that one such case exists in the non-distinction between the social and the societal, two terms that have been central to the thinking of Karl MARX and Friedrich ENGELS. As their writings have had considerable impact on major theorists whose work has shaped especially the qualitative social sciences, there therefore exists the possibility of a historical error with substantive impact on how we write (think) theory in the English language. [2]

Many scholars do not distinguish between "the social" and "the societal" even in languages, such as German and Russian, where the equivalent of the second notion (i.e., *gesellschaftlich*, *obščestvennyj*) is used quite frequently. There are suggestions in social work and sociology that the social and the societal need to be understood as different and distinguished theoretically, especially for doing appropriate empirical work (SCHEU & AUTRATA, 2011). Karl MARX does indeed use the two terms quite distinctly—at least in the German and Russian versions of his works. The purpose of this contribution is to make a case for a consistent distinction between the two adjectives, even if this means that it requires using a "ghastly" term (BAKHURST, personal communication, August 9, 2016). I do make this case for a distinction even though I know that all translation is treason—*traduttore, traditore*, as an Italian proverb goes—so that there cannot be an exact equivalent (ROTH, 2013). Differences—in understanding, meaning—in using and hearing a word are to be expected even when participants use the same language because relationship inherently results in a double view on the word or phrase (BATESON, 1979; MEAD, 1938). Thus, even the very best of translations—such as those of "Myšlenie i reč'" (VYGOTSKY, 1934) into German by Joachim LOMPSCHER and Georg RÜCKRIEM (VYGOTSKIJ, 2002) or the one into Italian by Luciano MECACCI (VYGOTSKIJ, 2008)—cannot be expected to be perfect (cf. VAN DER VEER, 2003). However, problems come to be

compounded for theory and method when additional interpretive variations are included. In the case of VYGOTSKIJ, this has led to a lack of correspondence between the Russian originals and the translations available in other languages such that the VYGOTSKIAN myth outside of Russia is founded on distortions, often brought about to serve the interests of the translators and users (MECACCI, 2017; MIKHAILOV, 2001). [3]

In the debate on the quality of qualitative research, it has been suggested that translation is part of method (TAROZZI, 2013). This author argues that language is a non-neutral tool so that, for example, translating grounded theory method at the same time is doing grounded theory method. In the case of the example discussed in this text, there is a difference whether some data feature is coded as *social* or as *societal*. Making distinctions or failing to distinguish between the two has consequences for the ways in which we theorize, for example, knowing and learning in the fields of education and (social) psychology. [4]

In the following, I begin by articulating the distinction made in some languages between what in English are the equivalents of the social and the societal (Section 2) and show, in the context of exchanges, how the distinction leads to different coding of the nature of the social exchange (Section 3). Three brief cases are provided to exhibit the usefulness of distinguishing between coding situations as social or societal, because the former is linked to the particular whereas the latter takes us to the universal (Section 4). This distinction is important for example in the learning of science and mathematics, where students are to acquire universal rather than particular concepts ("meanings"). Because Evald IL'ENKOV has provided a philosophical basis for the later works of Lev S. VYGOTSKY, an important social psychologist massively cited in the educational and psychological research literature, I explicate his readings of the different ways in which MARX and ENGELS employ the adjectives social and societal (Section 5). This sets us up for an elaboration of the differences between certain aspects of psychological theory in the Russian original, differences that appear in English (Section 6). I conclude by discussing some implications, including the use of automatic translation software. [5]

2. The Social and the Societal

In this article, "the societal" is taken as indexing something specific to society as a whole, whereas "the social" is taken as indexing any situation in which there are two or more people involved in some relation. Thus, whereas "the societal" implies "the social," the latter does not imply the former. [6]

The case made rests on the fact that MARX takes society, its relations and conditions [*Verhältnisse*] as the determining referent for the *ideal*, the *universal*, and *consciousness* rather than the social relations characteristic for smaller groups such as the family or tribe. Marxist psychologists such as Alexei N. LEONT'EV (1983) and Klaus HOLZKAMP (1983) developed theories in which the psyche is explicitly linked to the ensemble of societal relations, as stated in the sixth "Thesis on Feuerbach" (MARX & ENGELS, 1978, p.6). In the texts of

Russian Marxist philosophers and psychologists, certain key notions such as the ideal, the universal, and consciousness are consistently modified adjectively by *obščestvennyj* [societal] rather than *social'nyj* [social]. Failing to make the distinction, scholarly treatments of philosophical questions, such as the dialectics of the ideal and its role in psychology (e.g., LEVANT, 2012), possibly fall short because they lose an important conceptual tool. The hypothesis of the potential advantages of using "the social" and "the societal" distinctly therefore warrants being tested. [7]

Consider, for example, Evald V. IL'ENKOV, for whom human society is a most typical case of *concrete* community; and it is precisely "the relation of a human individual to society" that "is a characteristic instance of the relation of the individual to the universal" (1960, p.37 [1982, p.69]). He refers to the sixth "Thesis on Feuerbach," where MARX specifies the essence of human nature to be not just social but specifically *societal* [*gesellschaftlich*, *obščestvennyj*] which is the concrete opposite of the classical abstraction inherent in the individual. In German, the thesis states: "In seiner Wirklichkeit ist [das *menschliche* Wesen] das ensemble [sic] der gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse" (MARX & ENGELS, 1978, p.6), which, in Russian, is rendered as: "V svoej dejstvitel'nosti ona est' sovokupnost' vsej obščestvennyx otnošenij" (MARX & ENGELS, 1955, p.3). As a result, "the genuine human nature of each man can only be revealed through quite a concrete analysis of those laws which govern the birth and development of human society as a whole and of each human individual" (IL'ENKOV, 1960, p.37 [1982, p.69]). Society exists in and through its relations, societal relations; and these *societal* relations are the concrete universals characterizing not only humans, but also, in the Marxian analysis, the relations between commodities. *Value*, as conceived by MARX, inherently is tied to higher forms of development of society and does not initially exist as such in smaller groups, such as family or tribe. It is precisely when the relations are characteristically societal that the concrete universal, "the essence of human nature in general" can be inherent in, and constituting "the genuine human nature of each man" (IL'ENKOV, 1960, p.37 [1982, p.69]). [8]

There are suggestions that some German (SCHEU & AUTRATA, 2011) and Russian scholars (Anton YASNITSKY, personal communication; Andrey MAIDANSKY, e-mail, August 20, 2016) use the adjectives *sozial* / *social'nyj* [social] and *gesellschaftlich* / *obščestvennyj* [societal] synonymously. However, there are patterns that should encourage us to question this practice. Thus, for example, in the Russian original of "Dialectics of the Ideal," IL'ENKOV (1960) uses the adjective "social" 20 times, whereas he employs the adjective "societal [*obščestvennyj*]," its inflections, and the adverbial form for a total of 86 times. Importantly, the adjective societal modifies the nouns "ideal," "consciousness," "man," "practice," "being," and "life-activity." The adjective social *never* modifies these nouns, but instead often occurs as adverb modifying the adjectives "organised" and "legitimised," or modifies the nouns "nature," "process," and "plane." In MAMARDAŠVILI's (1986) essay "Analysis of Consciousness in the Works of Marx," consciousness is modified four times by societal but never by social. In psychology, in the Russian version of the influential "Activity,

Consciousness, Personality" (LEONT'EV, 1983) the noun consciousness always is modified by *obščestvennyj* [societal] ($n = 10$) and never by *social'nyj* [social] ($n = 0$); and this determination always is related to individual consciousness. The same happens when LEONT'EV breaks the philosophical question of consciousness into two: "(a) The question of societal consciousness [obščestvennom soznanii] and (b) The question of consciousness of (societal) man" (1994, p.27). [9]

For the German and Russian versions of MARX and ENGELS, there is a strict equivalence: *gesellschaftlich* and *sozial* (social) are translated as *obščestvennyj* and *social'nyj* (social). The same strict equivalence exists in the translation of the texts of LEONT'EV and VYGOTSKY into German. If the two adjectives were indeed synonymous, deviations from the strict equivalence would likely be observed. In contrast and consistently with the hypothesis of the synonymous nature of the social and societal, the latter adjective never appears in the English translation of "Das Kapital," where the German word appears 494 times. In the same vein, a recently published volume concerning IL'ENKOV's essay on the dialectics of the ideal contains $n = 290$ instances of social and $n = 0$ instances of societal (LEVANT & OITTINEN, 2014). [10]

3. The Emergence of the Ideal (Universal)—The Exemplary Case of (Exchange-) Value

In discussions of the Marxian conception of the ideal, of consciousness, philosophers refer to "Das Kapital [Capital]" and the analysis of exchange-value, or short *value*, the supra-sensible dimension of a commodity that exists next to its sensible use-value. According to MARX, there are three forms of value (MARX & ENGELS, 1962). MARX, in contrast to neo-Marxists, investigates concrete cases—the economy in England during his day—"for generating initial propositions through empirical work before moving on to model construction" (VANDERGEEST & BUTTEL, 1993, p.146) rather than using "'ideal type' models or 'formal configurations'" (p.136). We may understand his characterizations as a form of employing the grounded theory method, where he provides the codes for observable and observed cases of economic exchange and then moves to analytically develop theoretical categories (HALL, 1999). The point in this article is that it matters how we translate these codes into another language, a translation that itself can be understood as a form of grounded theory (TAROZZI, 2013). The codes MARX provides serve exemplary purposes, for the same way of coding can be transported into linguistics for coding verbal exchanges (ROSSI-LANDI, 1983; ROTH, 2006). [11]

In its first, *elementary, singular* form (Figure 1a), value corresponds to an *occasioned* barter exchange, where the quantitative relation between the amounts of the two commodities may be purely *accidental*. In its total or expanded form, which corresponds to all the barter exchanges that a weaver may engage, the same 20 yards of linen give themselves in terms of a variety of goods (Figure 1b).

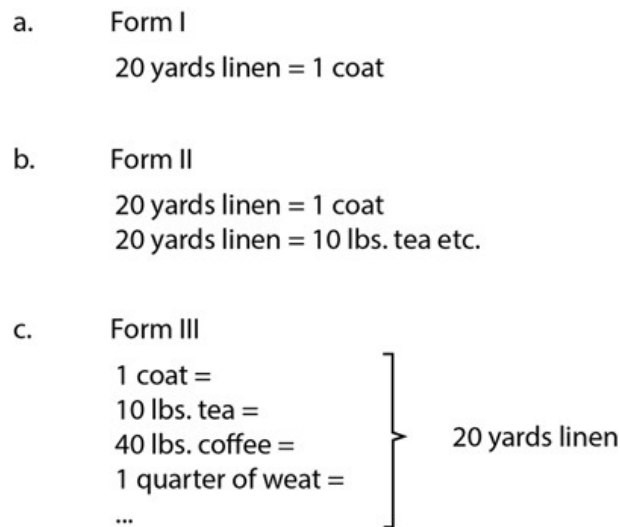


Figure 1: The three forms of value according (MARX & ENGELS, 1962, pp.78-79) [12]

This expanded relative form is but "the *sum* of the elementary relative expressions or equations of the first form" (p.79). In both early forms, the value of *one* commodity is expressed in another or many other, different commodities. In both instances, the commodity gives itself a value form, a sort of "private business [*Privatgeschäft*]" or "private trade." In both cases, the exchange constitutes a social relation but commodity value is contingent, situated, and partial. [13]

A third form emerges because all those others involved in trading express their commodities in the same form, in terms of 20 yards of linen, which, when they trade among each other, is a third commodity that serves as a reference (Figure 1c). In this form, the values of all commodities but linen are expressed simply and uniformly. That is, MARX concludes, their value form is simple and communal [*gemeinschaftlich*], therefore general, universal [*allgemein*]. This general value form emerges only as the joint work of the commodity world as a whole. A commodity, as the linen in the example, becomes "universal [*allgemeine*]" value expression when all other commodities, including new ones, express themselves in and through it. The result of this is that the existence of commodities as value [*Wertgegenständlichkeit*] is the "'societal existence' of things"; this existence expresses its universal [*allseitige*] *societal* relation so that its value form "has to be *societally* valid form" (MARX & ENGELS, 1962, pp.80-81). Whereas the German and Russian texts (MARX & ENGELS, 1960, p.76) use *gesellschaftlich* / *obščestvennyj* [societal] in all three instances of the preceding sentence, the English translation substitutes the adjective *social* (MARX & ENGELS, 1996, p.77). [14]

The difference between Form II and Form III may also be taken from the fact that in the former instance, a new commodity would merely add another item. All the commodities taken together, because each is expressing its value contingently in a range of forms, still do not lead to the universal. Any new commodity expresses

itself in one or more additional commodity or commodities, but again in contingent form. However, in Form III, because all existing commodities express themselves in the same commodity—first 20 yards of linen, later money—"every newly occurring type of commodity must follow suit" (MARX & ENGELS, 1962, p.80). The *general* value form (Form III), representing labor in an indistinct generalized form, is a *societal* expression of the commodity world. It is here, in this world, that the "general *human* character of labor obtains its specifically *societal* character" (p.81). [15]

The referent in MARX's work is *society* because division of labor leads to a generalized production of goods to meet human needs. This generalized production only emerges when there is a sufficient population size and density; MARX ties the emergence and existence of universals to the size and expansion of the lands and population. Any product contributing to the generalized production to meet needs, therefore, can be exchanged for meeting individual, personal needs. This, however, makes what is always my work equivalent to any other work. The linen in Form III—and, later, money—makes possible "the immediate exchangeability with all other commodities"; linen, money, are "in immediate societal form" (MARX & ENGELS, 1962, p.82). [16]

Value Forms I and II exist in and as social relations, but may occur without a more widespread-societal [*allgemein-gesellschaftlich*], general agreement on the expression of value. The commodity value in every (barter) exchange is social, common to and accepted by the participants in this specific situation. But Form III is universal; and it is for this reason that "the general relative value form of the commodity world has gained the objective consistence [*objektive Festigkeit*] and general *societal* validity" (p.83, emphasis added). That validity is not merely in reference to any (accidental) social situation but in reference to society as a whole. The emergence of money is unnecessary if there are only social exchanges, where barter is all that is required. The money commodity and money have a specifically *societal* rather than social form, they have the status of societal rather than merely social monopoly. As we know from underground economy, people continue to exchange forms of labor ("I do your electricity, you do my plumbing") or goods ("I give you plums in exchange for your pears"; seed exchanges). In these instances, the exchange value is local, contingent, and occasioned. Similarly, the commodity form reflects the societal character of everybody's work as objective characteristics of the commodities themselves, "thus the societal relation of the producers to the work totality" "is reflected in the societal relation of objects that exists outside of [the producers]" p.86). Again, the relation of producers to the *work totality* is not of social nature but precisely *societal*, because of the totality and the associated possibility to exchange one's labor for any other labor in society. [17]

Division of labor exists in several forms. One operates at the level of society, which pertains to the "separation of the societal production into its main genera, like agriculture, industry etc.," i.e., "division of labor in general" (p.371). The splitting of these genera into species and subspecies is division of labor in particular, and the division of labor is singular when it occurs within a workshop.

Division of labor in general is the result of the contact between different tribes and family groups, each of which, drawing on physiologically based 'natural' division of labor, uses different means and producing different types of food. The exchanges between spheres of production constitute the *societal* character of the commodity form and labor, whereas relations within the family or tribe are social, including the natural forms of division of labor. By means of exchange, the different spheres of production are related, thereby creating "more or less inter-dependent branches of the collective production of an enlarged society," which leads to a "societal division of labor from the exchange between spheres of production, that are originally distinct and independent of one another" (p.82). The key distinction to be made here is between the social nature of division of labor within the spheres production and the specifically societal nature of the division of labor in society as a whole, which makes the generalized production of needs possible. The *social* nature of labor and things produced cannot be mysterious, as it may appear when the adjectives societal and social are used synonymously. Instead, it is the societal nature of the products that is not immediately apparent, and this nature arises from the societal relation of the producer to the "totality of *societal* labor [*gesellschaftliche Gesamtarbeit*]" (p.87), that is, the relation between the individual labor and the aggregate labor produced in the society as a whole (i.e., over and above the shop and the type of trade or manufacture). Similarly, the relationship between objects (of production) is societal, though the relations are group- or community- specific, thus social, *within* a sphere of production. The consequence is that "the specifically *societal* character" of private labor only reveals itself in the exchange that occurs between the different, group- or family-based spheres of production. It is the exchange of commodities with other producers that makes different types of labor equivalent as *human* labor. [18]

MARX draws a parallel between things and language: "The determination of useful things [*Gebrauchsgegenstände*] as values is just as much their societal product as language" (MARX & ENGELS, 1962, p.88). Because "language is as old as consciousness," the latter, too, "is from the beginning a societal product and remains as such as long as humans exist" (MARX & ENGELS, 1978, pp.30, 31). The development of consciousness is tied to the development of society. That is, the "animal consciousness of nature (natural religion) ... or the behavior towards nature is conditioned by the form of society and vice versa" (MARX & ENGELS, 1962, p.31). The quoted sentence is part of a section that is omitted in the English translation (MARX & ENGELS, 1976, p.44) but that is also present in the Russian version (MARX & ENGELS, 1955, p.29). Here, as in the case of value (ideal), society rather than the social is the condition for the emergence. Initially, the division of labor only existed in sexual intercourse, then in a natural form arising contingently according to physiological or need-related differences. But it becomes real division only at the point when there is a division into material and mental-spiritual [*geistig*] labor (MARX & ENGELS, 1978). Thus, consciousness has to be considered in relation to society, for the "three moments, the productive forces, the state of society and consciousness, can and must come into contradiction with one another" (p.32). The above-noted double

appearance of the societal in LEONT'EV's statement of the philosophical question of consciousness therefore does not come as a surprise. [19]

For MARX, there are three conditions [*Verhältnisse*] (three forms of relations required) for the development of consciousness: 1. the production of means for the satisfaction of needs, 2. the emergence of new needs from need-meeting consumption, and 3. familial relations and conditions [*Verhältnisse*] (MARX & ENGELS, 1978). The German *Verhältnisse* translates as "relations," but also as "conditions" or "circumstances." In this context, as realized by the translators into English (MARX & ENGELS, 1976, p.42), the first two moments are conditions, whereas the conditions in the family are denoted as social relations. These three form the three moments of *social* activity. Importantly, "the family, which initially is the only social relation, later becomes a subordinate one, when increased needs create new societal relations [conditions] and the increased population new needs" (MARX & ENGELS, 1978, p.29). That is, MARX here describes the social relation as a subordinate one when exchange, operating between the different *social* groups, creates a system of generalized provision of needs. Human history has to be studied with respect to the state of society as a whole [*gesellschaftlicher Zustand* = societal state]. This is so because a "certain mode of production or industrial stage is always combined with a certain mode of cooperation, or *societal* stage, and this mode of cooperation is itself a 'productive force'" (MARX & ENGELS, 1978, p.30). The cooperation previously was identified to occur irrespective of conditions and purposes, that is, as cooperation with individuals in other domains of production. It therefore makes little sense to substitute "social" for "societal," because the state of the industry determines the state of society—such as in the opposition of "industrialized nations" to "developing nations." [20]

The exchange introduces a fourth condition [*Verhältnis*], which exists precisely in the societal relations between different productive forces. As a result, "*only now* after having considered four moments, four aspects of primary historical relations/ conditions, do we find that man also possesses 'consciousness'" (ibid.). That is, the exchange relations within society as a whole rather than the social relations within the family condition the emergence of consciousness. [21]

As MARX shows, the social alone is not sufficient condition for ideality and universality; it is only with the (exchange) relations between different groups each contributing to the generalized production for meeting human needs that the ideal arises in the generalized (universal) value form. There are many social animals, but, this relationship, as their relationship to the world, is "a purely biological relationship" (IL'ENKOV, 2012, p.185). In fact, it is suggested that "the animal does not '*relate*' itself to anything, it does not '*relate*' itself at all," a contention he explains by stating that "for the animal its relation to others does not exist as a relation" (MARX & ENGELS, 1978, p.30). [22]

4. Why It Might Be Useful to Distinguish Between Social and Societal

In the two preceding sections, I make a case for the distinction between two different adjectives that MARX uses to code different forms of economic exchanges. It has been shown that the same codes are applicable to the exchange of sign forms, the most important form of which is language (ROSSI-LANDI, 1983; ROTH, 2006). In the following exemplary cases, it matters whether we code a situation as social or as societal. Without the distinction between the social and the societal, there are many paragraphs and aspects in MARX's works that become mysterious at best or may make no sense at all. If the original codes are conflated into *social*, then this constitutes a form of recoding that occurs during the translation process (TAROZZI, 2013). To exemplify, consider the following three cases. [23]

4.1 Case 1: Material relations between people and social relations between things

In English, MARX and ENGELS (1996) write:

"To the [producers], therefore, the relations connecting the labour of one individual with that of the rest appear, not as direct social relations between individuals at work, but as what they really are, material relations between persons and social relations between things" (p.84). [24]

Why would the relationship between individuals at work not be social? And why would the relation between individuals appear as *social* relation between things? The relations of individuals are work *undeniably* are social. The point MARX makes is that these relations are not *societal*, but the relations between the objects from different spheres of production are indeed societal. The societal relations between forms of private labor appear as that what they really are, that is, "as objective relationships of persons and societal relations of objects" (MARX & ENGELS, 1962, p.87). [25]

4.2 Case 2: The universal is societal

In English, MARX and ENGELS (1996) write:

"It thus becomes evident that, since the existence of commodities as values is purely social, this social existence can be expressed by the totality of their social relations alone, and consequently that the form of their value must be a socially recognised form" (p.77). [26]

The substitution of social for societal is problematic because the existence of a "commodity as value" is referenced to society, not to the social; there are many aspects that are "socially recognised," but which are not universally valid. The universal nature of *value* arises precisely because of its dependency on the societal nature of commodities, which have been produced for a generalized satisfaction of needs. A better translation therefore reads: "It thus becomes

evident that, since the existence of commodities as values is purely societal, this societal existence can be expressed by the totality of their societal relations alone, and consequently that the form of their value must be a societally recognised form." [27]

4.3 Case 3: Production relations are societal rather than social

In English, MARX and ENGELS (1987) write:

"The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of societal consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social [sic], political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their societal existence that determines their consciousness" (p.263). [28]

The Russian (MARX & ENGELS, 1959, pp.5-6) and German (MARX & ENGELS, 1961, pp.8-9) editions map the use of "social" and "societal" one to one. All English versions found substitute social for societal. In this case, it is apparent that the relations of production are referenced to society. Thus, the translation should use "societal," as used here, to be consistent with the second sentence. The same is the case with "definitive forms of societal consciousness," because consciousness is a function of the economic structure of society rather than of some contingent social group (e.g., family). Finally, the particularity of human existence, as that of consciousness, is the life in society; thus life and being [*Sein, byt'*] in society is societal rather than social life [being]. [29]

5. On IL'ENKOV's Reading of MARX

My own field of research is learning along the lifespan in formal and informal educational settings, at work, and in leisure situation. My coding schemes were partially informed by initial readings of the English translations of the works of the social psychologist L.S. VYGOTSKY and the Spinozist philosopher Evald IL'ENKOV, who also elaborated a philosophical basis for the later works of the former. My coding schemes changed after reading German translations of these theorists and after obtaining many of the original Russian texts of both. The distinction between coding situations as social and societal matters because of the associated distinctions between the particular and the general, the local and the universal. These distinctions matter not only in philosophy but also in the research on learning—as in the question, "Does the individual learn something particular or something universal?"—and, importantly in the present context, to the quality of qualitative research—as in, "Does the research report particulars or does it 'extract general or invariant properties' ... 'to yield a coherent system of relations which can be put to the test as *such*'" (BOURDIEU, 1992, p.233)? In the following, I show that the coding distinction between the social and societal matters because these are differently related to the particular and general, situational and universal. [30]

In the original Russian of IL'ENKOV's writing, the referent for the universal, the ideal, consciousness is society (the societal) rather than the social. This is so because "human society is a most typical case of concrete community," the consequence of which is that "the relation of a human individual to society is a characteristic instance of the relation of the individual to the universal" (1982, p.69). Societal relations are always concretely present, which makes it possible that "the universal 'essence of man' is only real as a culture, as an historically established and evolutionising aggregate of all specially human forms of vital activity, as the whole of their ensemble" (IL'ENKOV, 2009, p.243). IL'ENKOV, as other readers of MARX in Russian, therefore takes up MARX's adjective *societal* when specifying the essence of man in the sixth "Thesis on Feuerbach." IL'ENKOV connects "the problem of the universal" with the "ensemble of societal relations" rather than with "social relations" (IL'ENKOV, 1984, p.279). As MARX before him, IL'ENKOV makes use of etymology in support of his point concerning the relation between the particular and the universal [*Allgemeine*, *vseobščee*]. In fact, in a chapter entitled "The universal," IL'ENKOV (2009) discusses both his own Russian term and MARX's case. [31]

The abstract and the universal arise in the course of human history, itself, as pointed out above, tied to the development of society and the exchange relations that allow the generalized production of goods for meeting human needs. In a letter to ENGELS, MARX writes, referring to HEGEL's discussion of the relation between the general and particular, that the German noun *Allgemeine*—which, as adjective *allgemein* translates *general*, *universal*—is the communal land of the tribe (MARX & ENGELS, 1974, p.52). The communal land is opposed to the *Sundre*, *Sondre*—the basis for the adjective *besondere*, particular, special—for the land that is parceled off, constituting private land. In fact, already before MARX, Ludwig FEUERBACH (1846) in a text on the relation between thinking and being, associates the former with the universal [*allgemein*, literally mine of all] to what is particularly mine [*mein*]. IL'ENKOV (1977) notes this example from MARX in at least two texts in support of the idea that abstract concepts in a culture arise out of and referring to some actual practices before they become the concept of philosophers (or scientists). [32]

The Russian term for *universal* is *vseobščij*, which literally translates as "all-common," common [*obščij*] to all [*vse*]. It is built on the same root *obšč-* (*obšča*, *obščee*) (FASMER, 1986) as society [*obščestvo*], the adjective pertaining to it [*obščestvennyj*], as *obščina* [community] and as *obščenie*, which translates a series of nouns important to MARX and VYGOTSKY, communication, interaction, and intercourse. This point, "is significant for ILYENKOV" (LEVANT, in IL'ENKOV, 2012, pp.150-151), quite obviously for theoretical reasons. It is precisely because the universal [*vseobščee*] is understood in terms of society [*obščestvo*] and the "totality of societal relations [*obščestvennyx otnošenij*]" that it is "common [*obščij*] to all [*vsex*]" (IL'ENKOV, 1991, pp.320, 322) and thus can be understood as representing "not the mute generic 'similarity' of the individuals but a reality dismembered within itself many times over and in various ways into 'special' ('particular') spheres complementary to, and essentially dependent on, one another" (IL'ENKOV, 2009, p.243). [33]

6. Educational Psychology and Education—Societal Relations and the Sociogenesis of the Ideal

Existing conceptualizations and theories drive the coding schemes qualitative researchers use to classify aspects of the situations they investigate. In the situation of the exemplary case at the heart of the present study, the distinction between the social and the societal has particular implications for theorizing and researching learning and development in the fields of educational psychology and education. MARX's conceptualization plays an important, but not inherently recognized role in cultural-historical psychology. (In German, the adjective *gesellschaftlich-historisch* [societal-historical] is often used instead of cultural-historical.) The importance of MARX to psychology comes through IL'ENKOV, who provided a philosophical justification of key tenets of VYGOTSKY's cultural-historical theory and developmental teaching | learning [*obučenie*] (DAVYDOV, 1994). But unlike some scholars who focus on the pertinence to theories of intelligence (SIEBERT, 2014), those working in the learning sciences and cultural psychology of education, for example, are more interested in learning, development, or the production and reproduction of cultural practices. [34]

The pertinence of IL'ENKOV and Marxism to theories of learning and development in educational contexts lies in the conceptualization of the ideal as concrete, that is, as "reciprocating movement of the two opposing 'metamorphoses'—forms of activity and forms of things in their dialectically contradictory mutual transformations" (IL'ENKOV, 2012, p.192). The distinctive nature between the social and the societal is quite apparent in education and educational research, where students often are placed in peer groups for the purpose of the "social construction" of concepts to overcome the limitations of their "individual constructions." However, the result of group work more often than not is incompatible with scientific and mathematical (i.e., universal, ideal) concepts. Thus, the products of their "social constructions" are not at all universal. This maps onto another frequently debated issue: the distinction between local (situated, traditional ecological) knowledge and scientific, universal knowledge. Thanks to the work in the social studies of science, we know that universal scientific and mathematical knowledge always manifests itself in the local, socially and materially situated practices (e.g., LIVINGSTON, 1986, for the case of mathematics, and LYNCH, 1985, for the case of science); but not all forms of local, situated knowledge is universal. As noted above, MARX ties the emergence and existence of universals to population size and density. Where the dividing line might be in the sciences is not quite clear, but the "socially constructed knowledge" within a research group is not necessarily consistent with the universally (by all) accepted knowledge within a "learned *society*," as shown dramatically in such cases as "cold fusion." [35]

With respect to student learning and development, some studies show how forms of mathematical reasoning first exist as institutional relations between teacher and student before appearing in the behavior of the individual some time later. It is precisely because students participate in the *societal* (rather than merely social) production of their material life that the ideality of "mathematical objects"

can be continuously produced and reproduced—initially, e.g., by producing "a tie between a mathematical action [material placement of a geometrical object] and a verbal account" (ROTH, 2016, p.34) and later by working with no less material "topological structures" (IL'ENKOV, 2012, p.183). Ideality and universality of mathematics are concretely present for each learner because the ideal form of a thing is a form of *societal-human* [*obščestvennogo-čelovečeskoj*] form of life-activity, as *societal* relations. This is why teachers are so important—irreplaceable by a computer and going beyond the mere social relations between students working in small groups, where the emergence of mathematical objects tends to be contingent and accidental. If individuals "such unchallenged representatives of the human race as Mozart or Leo Tolstoy or Raphael or Kant" distinguish themselves from "employees at manufacturing plants" and nevertheless express the same "essence of man" it is because they all are manifestations of the "totality of *societal* relations," "man in general" (IL'ENKOV, 2009, p.244). [36]

In the learning sciences, most theories, including social constructivism, take social relations to be mere contexts *in which* individuals learn. With respect to the person as a whole, VYGOTSKY paraphrases MARX in saying that "*the psychological* nature of man is the totality of societal relations shifted to the inner sphere and having become functions of the personality and forms of its structure" (VYGOTSKIJ, 2005, p.1023). Development, in contrast to the stipulations of J. PIAGET, is directed "not toward socialization, but toward *individualization* of societal functions (transformation of societal functions into psychological functions ...)" (VYGOTSKIJ, 2005, p.1025). Here it is important to retain the adjective societal, for it allows us to distinguish those instances where scientific, universal ideas (concepts) are reproduced in the behavior of the child from those where some particular, local, and non-universal idea ("*misconception*") is reproduced. [37]

The sign and its "meaning" are of special importance in the works of VYGOTSKY. One of the great opportunities of MARX's analysis read in the way presented here arises from the fact that the *sign*—which plays such a central role in the work of VYGOTSKY—is the precise semiotic equivalent of commodity such that the substitution of "sign" for "commodity" and of examples of signs for examples of commodities in "Das Kapital" (Capital) produces texts the content of which expresses findings in late-20th century philosophy (ROTH, 2006). As a fortuitous coincidence, the Russian term *značenie* generally translated as "meaning" also translates "value" and "magnitude." This allows us to establish a strict parallel between commodity (sensible) and value (suprasensible), on the one hand, and sign and "*značenie* [meaning]," on the other hand. Indeed, IL'ENKOV (2012) not only places the term meaning in quotation marks, but adds in parenthesis "function and role" (p.178). The adjectives social and societal then allow us to mark the distinction between locally valid use ("local knowledges"), on the one hand, and universally use (as in science), on the other hand. [38]

Another theoretical frame with currency in the educational and social sciences is *cultural-historical activity theory* that A.N. LEONT'EV (1983) originated.

LEONT'EV built the theory around the division of labor that allows a generalized production of needs in society; it thus consists of a totality of productive activities between which the products are exchanged. He introduces the category of *activity*, which, first, is the smallest unit within which human behavior, thinking, and consciousness can be understood and, second, retains all the characteristics of society. Personality is defined in terms of the individual hierarchy (knot-work) of the motives of all *societal* activities in which a person partakes. As a result, "individual consciousness as a specifically human form of subjective reflection of objective reality may be understood only as a product of those relations and mediations that arise in the course of the establishment and development of society" (LEONT'EV, 1978, p.79). The specifically *human* psyche is impossible outside the system of *societal* relations and *societal* consciousness. Here again, the establishment and development of society as a whole, with its characteristic relations, determine consciousness and psyche. Anthropogenesis, the process in which the human species comes to be set apart from other species, occurs as a qualitative leap from "mere psycho-phylogenetic development to the *societal-historical* level of the psyche as the 'highest' level of specification" (HOLZKAMP, 1983, p.56). [39]

LEONT'EV fundamentally is concerned with activity as the smallest unit that has all the characteristics of society. He is thus concerned with the "system of knowledge" and how the individual comes to act in accordance with it. The system, in the very way that the theory is set up, is society. That system, being society, manifests itself in "societal practice [*obščestvennaja praktika*]" in which the individual participates and in which "the system of knowledge" is "reflected in the form of language" (1983, p.133 [1978, p.41]). It is this systemic connection that makes possible the life of the ideal, such as the truths of Euclidean geometry. Thus, in English LEONT'EV (1978) writes, "'The *practical activity of man*,' notes Lenin, 'must have brought the consciousness of man a billion times to the repetition of various logical figures in order that these figures might acquire the significance of axioms'" (p.25).¹ Practical activity (by definition societal in nature), that is, societal practice, "is like a guiding thread for theoretical thought that prevents theoretical thought from losing the way leading to adequate knowledge" (p.26). [40]

7. Conclusion

The purpose of this article is to highlight the dangers to the quality of social science research when theoretical works and original data are translated into other languages. This is exemplified in a detailed case study of the problems that accrue when systematically changing the original adjective *societal* [*obščestvennyj*] to social [*social'nyj*]. These adjectives are part of many coding systems and theories. In particular, the relations that MARX stipulates to be the human essence are to be coded as societal rather than merely as social. If the distinction between the social and the societal advanced here holds up in future research, then there are consequences. English versions of MARX and the

¹ The translation error that substituted "million" for "billion [milliardy]" (LEONT'EV, 1983, p.118) has been corrected.

philosophers and psychologist grounded in his work need to be changed; and so will be the codes used in making sense of verbal data collected in qualitative social research. Philosophers may then seek to better understand why certain concepts (e.g., consciousness) are modified only by the adjective *gesellschaftlich* / *obščestvennyj* [societal] and never by *sozial* / *social'nyj* [social]; and social scientists will need to distinguish between "constructions" that are local and particular versus those that are universal and general—not only the constructions of research participants but more importantly their own constructions. If the two adjectives were synonymous, the likelihood of the consistent use would be very low. If the consistent use is unconscious, the phenomenon has to be investigated, for otherwise German / Russian Marxian philosophers and social science researchers would not really know what they are doing. For psychology, the mystery of how learners come to know the universals of the sciences (including mathematics) is gone as soon as we make the distinction between the (merely) social (local, particular) and the societal (general, universal). The differentiated use of the social and societal, as in MARX and ENGELS, may thus provide the scholarly community with a new conceptual coding tool to read those who have been and are working in the tradition, including IL'ENKOV, VYGOTSKY, and LEONT'EV and to do qualitative research (i.e. coding) that is grounded in the works of these scholars. [41]

Some readers may and others already have posed the question why the distinction between the social and the societal is not made, even though the two terms exist. Any suitable answer likely includes many different dimensions. Already noted in the opening section, some consider the term "societal" ghastly. Given that the adjective social note only describes characteristics of groups but also of society—e.g., social class, social outcast, and social fabric—there is some legitimacy in using it to replace the more precise adjective that only pertains to society. But has been noted that the works of VYGOTSKY "have been substantially distorted by commentators, disciples, and users *to meet their own specific needs*" (MIKHAILOV, 2001, pp.10-11, emphasis added). Moreover, there are also political aspects to the choice. If, as MARX and ENGELS, VYGOTSKY, and LEONT'EV state, personality is the ensemble of *societal* relations, then "deviants"—especially murderers and terrorists—are the product of society and societal relations. Locking up or executing a murderer or terrorist will not get rid of society and the relations that make it exist. The social, on the other hand, as MARX and ENGELS point out, is a characteristic of the group, even of a dyad. Removing one individual from a dyad rids us from the phenomenon. [42]

Qualitative social research more than its quantitative peer is concerned with the ways in which human beings constitute and articulate the social world in joint activity. In this situation, it is important to use concepts and associated adjectives that reflect the common reality in the way that research participants constitute it. If translations of such research into the lingua franca (English) flatten distinctions made in the original (e.g. from societal to social), serious misconceptions may result on the part of the reader. In recent years, I have noticed in scholarly discussions that some draw on automatic translation systems to help in the crossing between languages. In some situations, my collaborators have used

automatic translation software for rendering transcriptions in a language that they do not speak. Such use is highly problematic, for matters the most, the sense of the situation and the signification of words in many instances fails to be rendered. These automatic translations constitute a form of re-coding of the original data that are then taken as the object of the qualitative researcher not speaking the original language. Thus even those touted to be among the best automatic translators, such as DeepL, produce problematic renderings—though these may "work quite satisfactorily" for texts found in the Internet (GRÖHN, 2017, §6). Whereas such translations may suffice for everyday text, they cannot do the rigorous scholarly work required in the transposition of important conceptual distinctions from one to another language. [43]

It has been pointed out that the Russian term *obučenie* translate as both learning and teaching, which has considerable consequences for how human development is theorized (COLE, 2009). The interpretation of qualitative data changes considerably as a function of how the term is translated and operationalized in another language, such as English. In my own work, I have come across other translations into English that have had considerable consequences for scholarship. Thus, for example, in his later years, VYGOTSKY shifted from a focus on signification [*značenie*, *Bedeutung*, often translated as "meaning"] to sense [*smysl*, *Sinn*). It matters for the results of qualitative research whether we code a situation in terms of sense or for the signification of particular words and phrases—although sense and signification are related, there is a vast difference in scope between the two (e.g., SCHÜTZ, 1932). VYGOTSKY made reference to the work of the French philosopher and psychologist Frédéric PAULHAN (1928), who clearly distinguished between the two terms having at his disposal the equivalent pair *signification* / *sens*, suggesting that signification is only the most restricted level in a general framework of sense. Translations into English, however, often render *smysl* / *Sinn* / *sens* as "meaning," thus obliterating the very distinction made in French and later in Russian. SCHÜTZ (1932) actually develops the hierarchical framework of a sense-giving contexture [*Sinnzusammenhang*] in which signification (what the sign is standing for) is only the first of six nested levels. This hierarchy provides us with a differentiated set of six codes for analyzing different aspects of human relations where the English has only one code (i.e., "meaning"). The English translation (SCHÜTZ, 1967) renders *Sinn* as "meaning," thus eliminating all theoretical distinctions between the signification [*Bedeutung*] and sense [*Sinn*], and, thereby, destroys the entire coding system that SCHÜTZ provides. [44]

Doing good theoretical and empirical research across languages requires attention to the choice of words, especially in qualitative social research concerned with "meaning" (signification) of words and the sense these words make in producing and articulating the structures of the social world. One of the standard tests for the equivalence of translations consists in retranslating a text into its original. This, in my experience, is often impossible when English is involved, where, for example, 1. "meaning" may have been used to translate the Russian / German / French terms *značenie* / *Bedeutung* / *signification* or *smysl* /

Sinn / sens and 2. as shown here, "social" may have been used to translate *obščestvennyj / gesellschaftlich / sociétal* or *social'nyj / sozial / social*. [45]

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